



Transformative Learning: Preparing for Contemporary Chinese Student Pedagogy Demands -- A Paper Presented at Columbia University

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The Western graduate education system is not meeting its obligation. While Western educators believe that their learning approaches are the best, contemporary Chinese students are challenging that.

Respondents voiced their dissatisfaction with the classroom in terms of their financial investment and the value received.



Western educators are ill-equipped to assist Chinese students adjustment. The study respondents confirmed this. From a collectivist perspective the Western critical thinking is not easily transferred, leading Chinese students to question the value of investing in an individualist-oriented learning approach.

POLITICAL STATUS

“Harvard did not dispute that Asian-American applicants received, on average, lower personal rates... evidence of Harvard’s stereotyping of Asian-Americans as industrious but dull.”

“June 11, the State Department has been cutting back to one year the length of visas it grants to Chinese graduate students studying in certain subject areas.”

In the Spring [2018] Miller, “urged the president and other officials to stop admitting Chinese students into the U.S.”

Educators’ Views

Why should the Chinese student get special treatment? All foreign students have the same issues... If we cater to one, we [must] cater to [all] (Dean, Business School, personal communication, September 15th, 2017).

I gave a presentation... on how to integrate Western pedagogy As I proceeded pointing out some of those things... lacking in Chinese classes the Chinese professors in the room were nodding and chuckling... I have clearly established rapport with the group (Adjunct Professor, personal communication, September 1st, 2017).



STUDY DESIGN

This qualitative case study involves 22 Chinese-born first semester students attending R1 graduate-level programs in the Northeast United States. For most of these students, attending a graduate school in the US is their first experience outside of Asia. Respondents ranged in age from 23 to 25 years. Approximately 70% of the respondents are female.

Interviews were conducted between August 25th, 2017 and October 15th, 2017 using a mixed method approach of formal recorded individual sessions lasting approximately an hour and a half and informal public group discussions.

FINDINGS

The Western graduate education system is not meeting its obligation to provide an appropriate learning outcome for Chinese students.

- Encountering radically different pedagogical practices
- No knowledge or training in these different practices—critical thinking and reflection
- Several Western approaches are discouraged or banned in China—why learn it?!?
- Job market less receptive
- Chinese students are challenging rigid Western pedagogical requirements